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STATE FOR EAP/CM AND DRL
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/07/16

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: South China Lawyer Detained in Guangzhou -- Law
Suit Planned

REF: A) Guangzhou 17671; B) Guangzhou 17422

11. (U) Classified by Acting Consul General James Turner.
Reason 1.4 (d).

12. (C) On September 6, labor rights lawyer and China Labor Watch employee, Tang Jingling, was detained at the Guangzhou East Train station while proceeding through passport control to board a train to Hong Kong. Tang's passport was confiscated, because police in his hometown of Shantou City, eastern Guangdong Province, had canceled his passport. Tang believes the passport cancellation was unfair and is planning to sue Shantou authorities over the matter. Tang's incident is not new this year in Guangdong Province, but rather is part of the larger effort by Guangdong authorities to control unrest. The tactics employed in this effort include restrictions on travel for known activists and detention of foreign journalists. End summary.

13. (C) On the afternoon of September 6, Tang Jingling, a prominent labor rights lawyer in South China and a China Labor Watch employee, was detained at the Guangzhou East Train Station. Tang told Poloff he had been trying to board a train to Hong Kong in order to eventually fly to the United States. On August 30, Tang had received a visa from Consulate Guangzhou (with a visa referral), with the intent of attend training sessions at China Labor Watch headquarters in New York.

14. (C) While trying to proceed through the passport control, Tang's passport was taken from him, because his passport had problems. At first, the police would provide no explanation why Tang's passport had been confiscated. Because of Tang's legal background, he demanded a written explanation from the police describing the reason for this confiscation. After two and a half hours, the police gave Tang a written document stating that his passport had been canceled by the Shantou city (in eastern Guangdong Province) police, where Tang has his permanent residency.

15. (C) Tang says he is now planning on suing the Shantou Police for the incident. Tang bases his case on two factors: 1) he received no prior notice of passport cancellation before September 6; 2) there is no evidence by the Chinese government why his passport merits cancellation.

¶6. (C) This incident is not the first such act of control by Guangdong Provincial authorities this year. Since the violent protests in Guangdong Province's Taishi and Dongzhou villages in August and December 2005 (where police aggressively intervened to suppress villagers) Guangdong officials have been greatly concerned about instability and the role of political activists. Guangdong officials have three strategies to deal with the problem. The first is to change internal policy and attack the root of villagers' complaints such as corruption and land compensation issues (ref A). The second strategy, as witnessed by this latest incident, is to limit the space for activists to interact (both within and without China) and influence other citizens. For example, on February 3, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post (SCMP) reported that Tang Jingling was attacked by a gang of four men, because he had simply visited the home of human rights activist Guo Feixiong, known for his involvement with the Taishi incident. Moreover, in the past few months, Guangdong authorities have used similar travel restriction tactics with Zou Tao, a Shenzhen-based property rights activists (ref B). On May 11, Zou was detained at Shenzhen airport while trying to fly to Beijing. Last week, Zou told Poloff that he has been completely barred from leaving Shenzhen (see septel) and was detained again this summer while trying to travel to Hong Kong.

¶7. (C) Guangdong authorities use as their third strategy the restriction of media coverage of activists, village protests, and other issues that might embarrass provincial authorities. For example, in August 2005, several foreign reporters claimed to have been assaulted while covering the Taishi incident. One of them, SCMP reporter Leu Siew Ying,

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was again recently detained by police on August 16, while trying to research the current situation of the Taishi village. According to Leu, she had originally arranged a police escort to take her to Taishi, but was uncomfortable with the van that had been provided. She and her original driver then decided to return to Guangzhou, but stopped briefly at Taishi on the way back. An unmarked car followed them to the village and detained Leu for allegedly "disturbing order" and "traveling without a passport." Leu was then taken to a local Panyu (a district south of Guangzhou city) police station for eight hours and was threatened with a strip search, but authorities finally gave up on this tactic when they could not give Leu a reasonable explanation of the necessity of the strip search. Since the incident, Leu and another SCMP editor have filed a complaint at the Guangdong Foreign Affairs Office. In the coming weeks, Leu is also expecting to publish an op-ed article in the SCMP about her experience.

Comment

¶8. (C) This incident is the latest example of how Chinese authorities try to restrict the activities of people they consider a threat to state interests. Tang has never been formally charged with any crimes, but has become well-known to authorities because of his labor rights activism and connection with other human rights leaders. On August 31, Tang met personally with Poloff and complained of Public Security Bureau officials following him into the place of meeting. Apparently the Chinese authorities have been following his case from a distance, but felt compelled to intervene to prevent any international travel and possible contact with outside activists.

Turner